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## MR. WELLS AND HISTORY\*

The production of a universal history by a prolific and successful novelist arouses interest and impels curiosity, as Mr. Wells, of course, anticipated.

As a matter of record the *Outline* has hardly the novelty claimed for it. Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, and Prévost-Paradol's *Essai sur l'Histoire Universelle* are well known and successful works of that kind, while the often-used outlines of Fisher, Meyers, West, Robinson and others, would have answered the complaint of Mr. Wells expressed in his Preface,—a complaint which applies to England more than to America.

Altogether this is a noble, inspiring, and uplifting book. It strengthens our trust in God and in humanity, and is based upon the strongest argument in the world—the facts of history. The mistakes, omissions and inadequacies—and there are many—do not seriously impair the force of the argument, which is clear and convincing.

In the author's inimitable style, this comprehensive treatment of the whole history of man, including, as one writer has said, "everything that has happened from the day when the world was fire-mist down to the Treaty of Versailles", unfolds the great idea of the historical unity of man and the purposefulness of his long development, the exposition gathering increased volume and momentum as it proceeds, until it reaches the author's conclusion that—

"Life, forever dying to be born afresh, forever young and eager, will presently stand upon this earth as upon a footstool, and stretch out its realm amidst the stars." (II, p. 595).

The author declares, however, that—

"We have brought this *Outline of History* up to our own times, but we have brought it to no conclusion. It breaks

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\* *The Outline of History; Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind.* By H. G. Wells. Written with the Advice and Editorial Help of Mr. Ernest Baker, Sir H. H. Johnston, Sir E. Ray Lankester, and Professor Gilbert Murray. Illustrated by J. F. Horrabin. With maps, chronological charts, tables and index. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1920. Two vols. Pp. xiq, 648, and x, 676.

off at a dramatic phase of expectation. The story of life which began inestimable millions of years ago, the adventure of mankind which was already afoot half a million years ago, rises to a crisis in the immense interrogation of to-day. The drama becomes ourselves. We are engaged upon an immense task of adjustment to these great lines upon which our affairs are moving. Our true state, this state that is already beginning, this state to which every man owes his utmost political effort, must be now this nascent Federal World State to which human necessities point. Sooner or later that unity must come, or else plainly men must perish by their own inventions." (II, p. 579).

We have, then, a great book with a great conception, Not since Hegel has universal history been written with such a profound purpose. Hegel's great idea of the end of history was Freedom through Spirit; Wells's is Peace and Progress through Federation and Coöperation, based on the knowledge of man's whole history from the beginning.

It is not merely a universal history, but it is a realization of the universal in history. It is not merely a compilation of historical facts, but it is the tracing of the thread of human progress toward the one great goal of human history—peace, with all its great possibilities of brotherhood, coöperation, unification, strength, achievement and victory.

The ordinary universal histories fail to do this, and do not impart to us the sense of that unity, continuity and relationship which we know really underlie history. This book is rather a picture than a history. It is the work of an artist, not of a scientist. Perhaps this is the reason that it attempts more than a scientific historian to-day would dare to attempt, and appeals to a larger circle of more interested readers. The work is literature, for it deals with a great subject, and the author brings to it a fine and noble mind.

John Fiske has told us that the destiny of man is to be known in the light of his origin. Wells gives the physical origin so far as it is known, also something of the intellectual, but very little of the moral and the spiritual.

The book begins not merely with prehistoric man, but with prehuman life. It is as if one were taking a mile run for a

twenty-foot jump. It is not only that this early speculation seems needless, but it is vague and uncertain at the best. In Vol. I, chapter X is headed: "The Later Post-Glacial Palæolithic Men, the First True Men". This is surely early enough to begin the history of man, yet so much of the earlier period remains imaginary that while we can understand how it would interest the author of fantastic romances, like *The First Man in the Moon*, or *In the Days of the Comet*, we fail to see its real importance in the *Outline*. It is all still so fragmentary and indefinite that much more work by the specialist and expert is needed before it will be of much use to the student of general history.

There has been necessarily a great deal of detailed criticism, some of which Mr. Wells has answered recently in the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Yale Review*. For example, Mr. Gomme, Lecturer in Greek in the University of Glasgow, in a brochure of 48 pages, has pointed out a great many inaccuracies in the treatment of Greek and Roman history, due to the use of the wrong authorities or to a misunderstanding of the methods and conclusions of right ones. Even in his summing up of Roman history Wells seems to have failed to grasp the important lessons. "The Roman had come and had gone again. . . . There was one thing that did not perish but grew, and that was the tradition of the world empire of Rome and of the supremacy of the Cæsars." But Rome left more than a "tradition of empire", in her language, laws, roads, and genius. We are disappointed, also, in his explanation of the fall of Rome, a subject which contains one of the greatest lessons in all history, and is of especial importance to the student of the civilization and power of England and of America in this twentieth century.

It is evident, however, that a criticism of our author's treatment of the facts of history must be made with caution, as he has on his board of editorial advisers four of the ablest English scientists and historians, and although he has refused to incorporate in the text some of their corrections he gives them place in the footnotes. Indeed, the naïve discussions between the author and these chosen editors, carried on in footnotes, are not the least entertaining and instructive parts of the book.

But our criticism must go deeper. We would consider especially there subjects: Jesus and Christianity, The Middle Ages, and Napoleon. First, as to the place of Jesus and Christianity in human history. What Wells has seen fit to write on this great subject in Chapter XXX, "The Beginnings of Christianity", has been severely criticized, as might have been expected. It must be admitted that he is both confusing and inconsistent, but, on the whole, in the rest of the book he is true to historic fact and to the best Christian consciousness.

The whole Christian interpretation of history and of Jesus is based upon the centuries of preparation for the coming of Jesus. Christ in history is the only hope for a fair and worthy reading of history and the only basis of any sure hope for humanity, and to this great truth Wells gives evidence all through his book.

His description of the appearance of Jesus borrows much from a vivid and inaccurate imagination; as for example (I, p. 574), where he describes Jesus as "living upon casual gifts of food, yet always represented as clean, combed and sleek, in spotless raiment, erect, and with something motionless about him, as though he was gliding through the air". "In the Gospel", he continues (I, p. 575), "all that body of theological assertion which constitutes Christianity finds little support". As if Christianity were only a "body of theological assertion"! What he says (I, p. 576) about the preaching of the kingdom of heaven is so true and strong that it makes up for a good many misunderstandings, nor does he fail to see the plain social and political bent of the teachings of Jesus. "He was too great for his disciples, and to this day this Galilean is too much for our small hearts."

It is strange to find him saying of St. Paul (I, p. 588): "The present writer has been unable to find any discussion of the religious ideas of Paul before he became a follower of Jesus". Has he not read Acts VIII, 1; IX; XXI: 39-XXVI: 29; Galatians I, II? Or, we may refer him to McGiffert's *The Apostolic Age*, chapter III. Incidentally, our author's statements in regard to the origin of Sunday, and to the relation of primitive Christianity to Mithraism, are not in accordance with the latest Christian scholarship.

The author's treatment of the Mediæval period is quite inadequate, on account of his failure to understand the ecclesiastical history of the period and to appreciate fully the influence of the Church and of Christianity from the middle of the eleventh century to the middle of the seventeenth, when those influences were supreme. He pays, however (II, pp. 63, 64), an eloquent tribute to the influence of the unknown Christian saints that "through those ages cleared the air and made a better world possible", and he rightly ascribes this to "that Spirit of Jesus which still lived and lives still at the core of Christianity". "We realize", he continues (p. 75), "that, in spite of much weakness and intellectual and moral unsoundness, to this extent the Christian Church has *worked*."

In the preaching of Urban II and Peter the Hermit with the widespread popular response, "for the first time we discover Europe with an idea and a soul!"—and the result is the Crusades, which were spectacular enough, but whose influence is easily overestimated. Wells has omitted any reference to Nicholas I, the greatest pope of the ninth century, and to the Forged Decretals of the same period, which were the foundation of the later papacy and of the whole mediæval ecclesiastical system.

He fails to discuss adequately the affiliation of the large movements of the period, the real reason for the separation of the East and the West, the establishment of the papacy, the rise of the temporal power, feudalism, the empire, monasticism, and scholasticism; and there are several inexcusable gaps in his section on the "Defects and Limitations of the Papacy".

On the subject of Scholasticism, the author fails to grasp the central thought. "Plato as distinguished from Aristotle was almost unknown. Some Neo-Platonic writers were known, but Neo-Platonism had much the same relation to Plato that Christian Science has to Christ." (II, p. 169). It is sufficient to draw attention to such a misstatement of the facts. Mr. Ernest Baker's criticisms in the footnotes do not help to clear up the difficulties, and he is clearly in error in his note on the author's correct statement (p. 171), "that the philosophy of the Catholic Church was essentially a Realist philosophy". Thomas Aquinas gave the final and complete form to the philosophy of the Catholic

Church, and his philosophy was the quintessence of Realism. Nominalism had a temporary triumph in the schools, but Thomas remained supreme in the Church, and Pius V gave him the fifth place among the Latin *Doctores Ecclesiae*. Wells omits to mention St. Anselm and St. Bernard.

It was through Nominalism and teachers like Occam and Marsilius of Padua, of the fifteenth century, that modern individualism and democracy arose and found their theoretical justification, with an inspiring influence on national consciousness. Here again, as our author clearly sees, is the influence, not of the teachings and life, nor of the theology, but of the Spirit of Jesus as the basis of true individualism—the supreme worth of the individual soul.

“The Church and the Christian missionary may not have intended to spread equalitarian doctrines, but behind the Church was the unquenchable personality of Jesus of Nazareth, and even in spite of himself the Christian preacher brought the seeds of freedom and responsibility with him, and sooner or later they shot up where he had been.” (II, pp. 157, 158).

Little or nothing is related of the battles of the fifteenth century. “They are the ornamental tapestry of history, and no part of the building.” (II, p. 179). Yet these very battles marked the downfall of Feudalism, the rise of Nationalism and the formation of a national consciousness in the people themselves.

In general, the picturesque and dramatic naturally appeal to Mr. Wells more than do the historical aspects. The book thereby gains in color and vividness, but loses in scientific value. There are three pages concerning Loyola, and only a few lines on the Jesuits. More attention is paid to the personality of Charles V than to the principles and progress of the Lutheran Revolution and its significance in world history. His keen insight is shown, however, in a sentence on page 272: “Protestantism in breaking up the universal Church had for a time broken up the idea of a universal human solidarity. Even if the universal Church of the Middle Ages had failed altogether to realize that idea, it had at any rate been the symbol of that idea.” But really the fine passages exhibiting exceptional analysis and

insight, striking judgments, stimulating illustrations and illuminating interpretations, are too many to quote, or even to enumerate.

When he comes to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the "Age of the Great Powers" (Book VIII) Wells gives the clearest evidences of his great ability as a descriptive writer; and the political, social, scientific, religious and philosophical aspects of the modern period are brought out with accurate and vigorous analysis.

We may ascribe to his English prejudice his treatment of Napoleon. However one may estimate the personal character of Napoleon, the historian must recognize his supreme importance in preserving and maintaining the essential principles of the French Revolution, in stamping them indelibly upon the French people and in extending their influence throughout Europe, as the most important fact of the nineteenth century.

The story of the nineteenth century is perhaps the best part of the work. The criticism of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 brings out its striking contrast to that of Versailles in 1919; and the results of the former are clearly shown. The condemnation of Napoleon is brilliant and forceful, even if somewhat one-sided.

The outline of the task of the present world, with a graphic description of the Mechanical Revolution and of the Industrial Revolution, rightly distinguished from each other, with a summary of results since 1848, forms a most interesting and valuable section, which is followed by a sympathetic discussion of the various socialistic theories attempting to solve the great industrial problem.

"The problem in its completeness involves the working out of the best methods in the following departments: Education (preparation of the individual); Information (truthful, clear publicity); Representation (informed and obedient agents); The Executive (responsible without being hampered in intelligent initiative); Thought and Research (systematic criticism and popular judgment)." (II, pp. 413, 414.)

"An enormous amount of intellectual toil and discussion and education and many years—whether decades or centuries no man can tell—must intervene before a new order, planned as ships and railways are planned, runs, as the



cables and the postal deliveries run, over the whole surface of our earth. And until such a new order draws mankind together with its net, human life . . . must become more and more casual, dangerous, miserable, anxious and disastrous." (II, p. 416).

The discussion (II, pp. 416-426) of the basis and methods of the controversy between science and orthodoxy in the last century, and its unfortunate effects on religion and humanitarianism, is highly illuminating, and merits more than a passing notice.

The closing chapters show the growth of imperialism, which is strikingly characterized as "megalomaniac nationalism", culminating in a description of the World War and its results so far as known.

In his conclusion Wells justifies his work in a description of "The Next Age in History" which is to usher in "The Federal World State":—

"Our true God now is the God of all men. Nationalism as a God must follow the tribal gods to limbo. Our true nationality is mankind. Religion and education, those closely interwoven influences, have made possible the greater human societies. We have found, in the intellectual and theological conflicts of the nineteenth century, the explanation of that curious exceptional disentanglement of religious teaching from formal education which is a distinctive feature of our age, and we have traced the consequences of this phase of religious disputation and confusion, in the reversion of international politics towards a brutal nationalism, and in the backward drift of industrial and business life towards harsh, selfish, and uncreative profit-seeking. There has been a slipping off of ancient restraints; a real *de-civilization* of men's minds. (We would lay stress here on the suggestion that this divorce of religious teaching from organized education is necessarily a temporary one, a transitory dislocation, and that presently education must become again in intention and spirit religious, and that the impulse to devotion, to universal service and to a complete escape from self, which has been the common underlying force in all the great religions of the last five and twenty centuries, an impulse which ebbed so perceptibly during the prosperity, laxity, disillusionment, and scepticism of the past

seventy or eighty years, will reappear again, stripped and plain, as the recognized fundamental structural impulse in human society.) Education is the preparation of the individual for the community, and his religious training is the core of that training." (II, pp. 581-582.).

These are strong words and they are true words. They are the deliberate conclusion of one who has shown himself a comprehensive student of history, a keen observer of human nature and of the conditions and needs of the times, as well as a real thinker. "Human history", he concludes, "becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

His prophecy of a Federal World State is undoubtedly a true prophecy of what will and must at last be realized. But beyond this, may we not see the self-realization of the nation through the federation of nations, just as we behold the self-realization and redemption of the individual through and only through the brotherhood of man? For federation and brotherhood mean coöperation and mutual service, and only through these can the highest be attained, either by the nation or by the individual.

There are three phases of human history: (1) Solidarity; (2) Individualism; (3) Personality, in its complete and perfect form, through the solidarity (the federation of nations and of individuals) of which it is an integral part and final purpose. For the perfection of personality, the realization of the image of God in which humanity is created, must be the purpose of creation and the goal of the centuries of history. In those great words of St. Paul:—

"The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope, because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."

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